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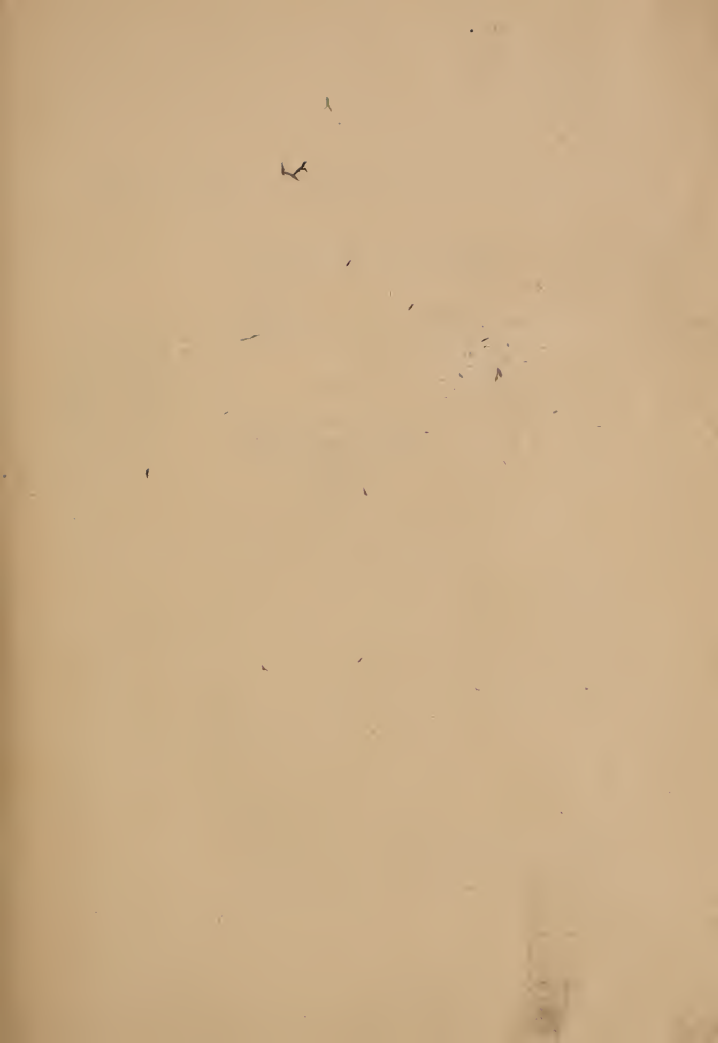




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Rev. E. H. Hall.

May 11, 1899.

PUBLISHED BY  
DANIEL WATERMAN,  
UTICA,  
ONEIDA CO., N.Y.

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[PRESS OF L. C. CHILDS & SON, UTICA, N. Y.]



## Life from a Wheeled Chair.



**T**HAT life is a battle goes without saying. And battles are always interesting to read about, to hear of, and even to look upon, provided we are at a safe distance. There is something in heroism that captivates us, inspires us ; but if we are in the midst of a face to face, hand to hand, inch by inch conflict, in whatever aspect it may appear to outsiders, to those personally concerned in it the heroic element is not apparent. That is left to be embodied in song or story, or

cherished in memory, long after the combatants have gone beyond the reach of fame or glory. If we live in this world we must fight or shirk ; and the most of us, in our present depraved, mortal conditions, like to fight something or somebody. But we all would like to choose our foes, our battle-fields, our ammunition and our generals.

A friend suggested that I should describe "The daily combats of a confirmed invalid." No easy task, I assure you.

I have said that we all like to choose our battle-fields. Mine had been an active, busy life, amid pleasant surroundings, and with more freedom of body and mind than falls to the lot of most women. Before my illness, I could walk and run like a girl ; and nothing but the indignity it would offer to

my gray hairs prevented me from jumping over the last three steps of every flight of stairs I came down. But the blow came suddenly, and, almost in a moment, I was disabled, crippled, helpless, ordered to the rear by that fearful disease, rheumatism.

At first I was conscious only of those indescribable agonies which accompanied my torturing malady. To be out of pain I would have given a kingdom ; at times my own soul. I would have relinquished the love that was dearer than life, for one hour's respite.

After months of racking pain, succeeded months of exhaustion and depression, in which the strongest feeling that possessed me, was to be allowed to crawl away into some dark corner alone and die. Even the love and sympathy of friends, the tenderness and un-

wearied kindness of my physicians fell unnoticed and uncared for. To die was bliss, was heaven. But I was not to die. I was to live, but how? To be carried where I had walked; to be helped and tended and waited upon; I, whose motions had been so quick, that while others were getting ready to move, "could have gone, and done, and got back again;" to look upon the world from my chamber windows, or catch passing glimpses of it from brief outings in a wheeled chair. These were my captain's orders; this my battle-field. Mind, soul and heart, all but the body rose up in mutiny. "This can not—shall not be," I said. "This is to be," was the answer:

Yours not to make reply,  
Yours not to reason why;  
Yours is to live, not die,  
No one has blundered.

I am not to be discharged from the service, I am to be kept in it, detailed for such duties as my weakness and wounds will permit. I must still wear the uniform and keep my armor bright. And the warfare that I must wage can not be conducted on any pre-arranged regulation plan. It consists mostly of single-handed skirmishes with guerillas. They swoop down upon me in the shape and guise of my "wants," at the very break of day, for I awake generally with the sun.

I never realized how our whole life is made up of gratified wants, until I came to this experience. I want to turn over in bed ; I can't. I want to get up ; I must wait till it is time. I never did when I was well ; I rose out of season as well as in season if the desire possessed me. I want to be bathed and dressed, and have my hair brushed and

see the morning paper, and oh! how I do want to go out into the kitchen and look into the refrigerator and the pantry, and to arrange the dishes a little differently on the breakfast table, and pour out the coffee for my husband, putting in just the right quantity of cream and sugar, as I used to do. But instead, I am to sit by and look on, being the constant recipient of the most loving attentions, but unable to do even one thing for myself or for anybody else.

Oh, the delight there is in the daily serving one's self as well as those we love. If you don't believe it, just allow yourself to be tied hands and feet for a month, and try being served. Do you suppose the angel Gabriel could button your shoes, or pin your collar, or tie your bonnet strings, as you would do it yourself? Did anybody ever

arrange your books, or your flowers, or your furniture precisely as you would do? It might be a thousand times better, but your personality is absent, and one might as well try to wear somebody else's clothes and feel fitted, as to attempt to live comfortably in another's surroundings; and an invalid's surroundings are not her own, except to a limited extent.

Then besides these guerilla troops of one's wants, are the daily combats with aggravations. My handkerchief has fallen from my lap, and I cannot reach it, and my nurse is for a moment beyond call. My book is just an inch and a half beyond my finger's touch. There is a fly crawling on the back of my neck, gloating in the knowledge that he can't be brushed off by me. A large bumble bee has flown into the room and is circling

around my head with malice in every buzz. My foot itches, my arm aches, there's a hair-pin pulling at a single hair, and I, helpless, can only sit still and meditate on the total depravity of the entire animate and inanimate creation, thus to take advantage of a fallen foe. And I look at the Irishman in front of the house, bringing in coal, and a Dutch woman washing my neighbor's windows, with a feeling of positive envy, such as in the days of health I had never felt for any mortal man or woman.

A confirmed invalid is liable at any moment to sudden and violent attacks of other maladies than the one in whose constant grip he is held. We all know that when a powerful enemy is making things lively for any country, then is the time for a general rebellion among the colonies. Sinews, joints and



muscles have joined forces, and stiffly refuse to obey my orders. My heart and lungs, stomach and liver, get up little scimmages on their own individual account ; and all through my system there is created a state of things which strongly resembles the condition of our country during the late "unpleasantness."

Besides, invalids are especially at the mercy of their nerves ; and of all the lawless, contemptible, treacherous disturbers of the peace of one's body, nerves stand at the head. Mine occasionally run riot. At times I feel myself in the hands of a wild mob ; I can't conquer them as I used to ; or frighten them, or reason with them, or pacify them. They assert themselves in every inch of my body. Strong-nerved lookers-on will say sometimes, when I am writhing and cowering

in their cruel grasp, "Don't be alarmed, it is nothing serious ; this is only a nervous attack." Who is alarmed? And if there isn't anything serious in it, there certainly isn't anything funny. What would those antedeluvian sinners have thought if they had heard Mrs. Noah, looking calmly out from the windows of her refuge as they were just going under, placidly remark, "Don't be alarmed, this is only a deluge." And how soothing to the feelings of a man who has been blown out of his very boots and landed half a mile from his home, to be told complacently, as he shoots overhead, by some one looking up from a tornado cave, "Don't make a fuss, a cyclone isn't anything." My state of mind is somewhat similar when I am quietly assured that "nervousness is nothing."

But there came to me a more bitter struggle than any of these I have mentioned. It was when realizing that my life was hopelessly ruined, my rebellious will, my questioning heart and impatient temper, my whole self, gathered itself together for a desperate, but impotent resistance. But this terrible struggle was fought to its bitter end ; and at last there came to me a child-like trust in the wise orderings of him whom we call "Our Father." Then a new chapter opened in the history of my experiences. There is a peace born of struggle, a victory secured by defeat. And I, sitting day by day in my wheeled chair, looking out upon the world, in which I shall never take an active part again, feel that there have come compensations which are real and satisfactory, and I am glad to be able to testify to them for the sake of my

sister sufferers. I can only touch upon a few.

Of two things I am profoundly conscious. I have a body, a battered wreck of a body hardly worth the name, but the body is not I.

There were times when pain and weakness seemed to have gained a temporary mastery ; but underneath the fiercest agony and the utmost exhaustion, through delirium and fainting, when the very shadow of death hovered close to my side, a something within me, not flesh, but spirit, still remained unconquered. I can't describe it, I only felt it; and, ignorant and unscientific woman that I am, I can stand and smile calmly and confidently in the face of all the naturalistic theories of our scientists, and be knocked down flat by their specious arguments and

logic, and after every "knock-down," I will pick myself up and say as I said to disease, "There is something inside of me which you have not, which you can not touch." My body imprisons me, fetters me; my brain wearies me, my heart saddens me, but there is something still left which is not imprisoned or fettered, wearied or saddened. I feel it, I know it. Explain it.

Then from the axis of my wheeled chair the world itself has a different and ever-changing horizon. The circle sometimes so small, fifteen feet square bounds it, then so large that it stretches far beyond the slopes of the hills north and south, and the suntinged clouds of the east and west. When self is the centre, it is the fifteen feet. When my thoughts are wandering off to where other sufferers, crippled soldiers like myself

lie, where is the limit? The brotherhood of suffering is as wide as the brotherhood of man; and when one can open the heart and drive the demon of self out, it does not stand empty long. There are angels just outside waiting to come in; pity, sympathy, tenderness and love. And there is this comfort always: while we must not be selfish, we can be strongly individual and unconventional. The world goes on; we are not in it, happy are we if not of it. Society runs in groves and ruts, and our church life has its rules and routines; I am independent of both. What do I care, for instance, for the fashions? My gowns are only subject to the laws of comfort and adaptability.

“Bustles may come, and bustles may go,  
My wrappers go on forever.”

I needn't dress for dinner, for tea, or for

breakfast for that matter. Mrs. Grundy would make no remarks whatever if I should sit up in bed and drink my coffee attired in an afghan and my stockings. Society makes no demands upon me, does not ask the first thing of me. No calling upon people that you don't care a fig about, simply because they are in your set, or your church, or your neighborhood. And what are lunches and dinners and five o'clock teas, and kettle-drums to me? Or church fairs, or hospital bazaars, or charity theatricals? Oh, the bliss of not being put upon this committee, or that committee, wearing out your shoes and your patience, neglecting your husband's buttons and stockings, to do that which is often a weariness to the flesh, and a positive injury to the spirit.

But although society's doors are shut to

me, that which makes true society, friends, ah ! My pen fails me here, my eyes fill, my heart throbs as I write of them. I never dreamed that such love and generosity, and tenderness and sympathy were in the world. The first anemone or trailing arbutus of the spring is sent to me ; the last rose of the summer garden is culled for me. Rooms fragrant with flowers, while the winter winds howl without ; luscious fruits heaped in daintiest dishes to tempt the appetite, and sweeter and more refreshing than all, the words that have fallen from friendly lips. The brave, cheery words of my doctor, words even more helpful and strengthening than the tonics he brings. The comforting, quieting assurances of my pastor, the pettings, and coddlings, and caresses of those nearest and dearest, and the helpful hands



everywhere stretched out, for the thousand offices which helplessness requires. These can not be enumerated or summed up by any arithmetic I have ever studied. Occasionally, a well meaning but "tactless" visitor will rasp me by allusions or comparisons; mournful allusions to her own wretched state of health, when she is enjoying a physical condition I should consider paradisaical, or comparisons of my blissful condition with some more deeply afflicted sufferer, whom I can not help, or insinuating that different medical treatment might have resulted in my entire recovery. Then there are still left in this world unmistakable descendants of Job's three comforters, whose pious admonitions, kindly meant, but injudiciously expressed, act upon me in certain nervous conditions like the breathings

of Satan. They arouse in me such a mortifying exhibition of the old Adam, that I have to make several excursions into the valley of humiliation and repentance before I can recover my spiritual equilibrium. But such visitors are few and far between, not worth mentioning. They are only little slivers, that irritate for the time, but when removed are easily forgotten.

Among the pleasantest experiences of my invalid life are the new friendships I have formed. Friends whose faces I have never seen, by letter, by messages, by books, have knocked at my chamber door and been welcomed in ; and by some spiritual magic have grown into old friends at once. I have one in my mind, who folded a piece of herself in a little silken banner which, hanging over

my couch, whispers a perpetual message of peace and comfort.

Books are becoming more and more to me like living people. I am only able to read by snatches, and am learning to catch things on the fly. I have to do with books as I do with the dainties sent to my table; a taste here, a sip there, is all that is permitted me. One would think that the mixture of dishes served up to me would produce a mental dyspepsia. Shakespeare and Samantha Allen, Browning and Uncle Remus, Fenelon and Sam Jones, Tennyson's last poem, and "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," besides occasional nibbles at the literature of the day; a little theology, or science, or poetry, flavored with delicious extracts sent to me in little cards and pretty books. Each and all enjoyed without a twinge of con-

science either as to the time or the manner of my literary lunches. No neglected household duties stare me in the face ; no uncomfortable suspicion that I ought to be doing something else. My conscience is behaving with great discretion in regard to most things, particularly on the subject of my "doings." A friend sent me this scrap of condensed wisdom, worthy of Solomon :

"Do what you can,  
Not what you cannot ;  
Not what you think ought to be done,  
Not what you would like to do ;  
Not what you would do if you had more time.  
Not what somebody else thinks you ought to do,  
But do what you can."

Sewing, knitting, crocheting, embroidery, my piano, household cares,—these are things of the past. What can I do? Only one thing: I can write. My first attempt, after

a year of utter helplessness, was to write a note of ten words, with the softest crayon pencil. After some months I was able to hold a stylograph and write an hour at a time. I am now struggling with a typewriter. As I am only able to use one finger, it is slow work, but I am gaining upon it. Scribbling was one of my youthful pastimes and follies. We do not always outgrow them.

One childish trait, lost for a time, has come back to me ; an enjoyment of the little pleasures of life.

I look out upon the earth with almost childish eyes, on the flowers and birds, the clouds and the sunshine. I forget that there are theories of evolution, and natural selection, and wind currents, and ether waves. All speak straight to my heart, as if they

came fresh and new from the hand of God. Sometimes I am afraid that my interest and sympathy will be too much drawn away from the human in this world. I am much more interested in the domestic affairs of a pair of white doves, just outside the library window, than I am in those of my neighbors; particularly since the mother dove died and the disconsolate widower, after driving me nearly wild with his mournful cooing, suddenly brought home a young stepmother, which, of course, created a disturbance at once. And my righteous soul has been very much exercised about the irregular life a profligate robin is leading. He tunes up at all hours of the night with a reckless jollity that suggests bacchanalian revels. And I, lying awake in my bed, have mildly remonstrated with him for such conduct.

An invalid's nights are fruitful sources of queer fancies and vivid imaginations. For months my sleeps were a series of "catnaps." In the intervals I have built hospitals, and composed verses, fortunately forgotten by morning; I have gone down into "Wonder Land" with Alice, and "Back of the North Wind" with Macdonald. At other times I have counted the clock-ticks, and conjugated French verbs, and watched swinging pendulums and jumping flocks of sheep, in my vain endeavors to go to sleep; but sleeping or waking, by night and by day; through visions and fancies, the fact of my invalid condition is ever present with me.

So my chapter of experiences ends.

This outline of my personal history for four years is incomplete, but as far as it

goes, true in every particular. If it were all filled in, it would make a book equal to that Chinese novel in two hundred volumes. The mystery of suffering completely baffles us, but the ministry of pain can be partially understood if we are willing to learn the lesson. If it can do nothing else for us, it can bring us into fellowship with the "Captain of our salvation," who, himself, was made "perfect through suffering."





































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